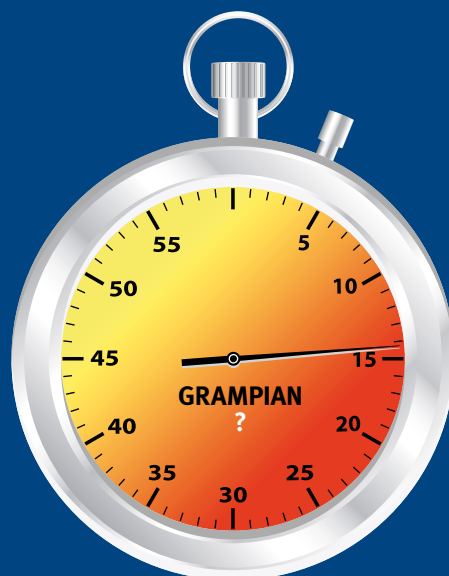


FireFighter

Trade Union Magazine of the Year

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union www.fbu.org.uk

June 2010



It's about time

Why the FBU has launched a major
campaign for national standards of
response time

See p12



Let's move forward together



I am sure that you will have been following closely the political developments since the general election.

The new Con-Dem government has already taken to its cost-cutting agenda with relish.

Last month over £6bn in cuts across the public sector were announced. This will mean unemployment for hundreds of thousands of working people, unless the trade union movement can resist.

The emergency budget later this month is likely to set out £50bn of

cuts – a return to the worst days of the Thatcher government.

We don't yet know exactly how these cuts will affect the fire and rescue service.

But what we do know is that after five years of so-called "modernisation", there is nothing left to trim. Cuts will mean stripping frontline fire and rescue services to the bone.

The future of our service

The past five years have been among the most difficult ever faced by our union. As a result, we have seen more industrial

disputes than at any time in the union's history, as members have fought to defend local services and resist attempts to impose harmful change.

Nobody wants to see industrial action in the fire and rescue service. But politicians and chief officers should take note: FBU members will not allow our service to be dismantled.

The government is busy making its plans. For us that is likely to mean:

- ◆ further attempts to cut jobs and services
- ◆ further restrictions on pay
- ◆ further attacks on our pensions

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YORGOS KARAHALIS/REUTERS



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Meet biker and FBU brigade secretary Tony Smith

- ◆ further attacks on shifts and other conditions of service
- ◆ continued threats to our emergency fire controls.

We face the prospect of the worst cuts in living memory – and we need to be prepared to fight back to resist them.

We have campaigned for the past five years to highlight and defend the role of our service. We have held some of the largest trade union lobbies of parliament in recent years – despite the fact that we are very far from being the largest trade union in the UK.

This year we plan to build on this work by campaigning around the theme of fire service response times as a part of our battle against the cuts.

I am acutely conscious that the

threat of attacks has not disappeared. The employers and government are as determined as ever to pursue their damaging agenda. But I firmly believe that our union is better placed than it has been for a long time to confront them.

And I can pledge this. As long as I am general secretary, members engaged in such action will have the full and wholehearted support of myself, the head office team and the executive council. I believe they can count on the support of other members throughout the UK.

General secretary election

I would like to express my thanks at being re-elected as general secretary.

It has been a great honour to hold this position for the past five years. Having stood for re-election on my record, I am immensely proud that members have given me a mandate to serve for a second term.

I wish to particularly thank the wide layer of officials and activists throughout the union who campaigned on my behalf.

With extremely tough battles to come, we will need to be united and organised as never before.

I appeal to all members and officials to unite to defend our service and our profession from the cuts and attacks we will all face in the coming period.

Let's move forward together.

Matt Wrack

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FBU conference delegates plan for the future



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Not getting your own copy of *Firefighter* at home? Make sure you have informed your brigade secretary of any recent change of address



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STEFANO CAGNONI

June 2010

→ Latest news

→ Sounding off

→ Conference report



ROMFORD REORDER

London firefighters demonstrated against Brian Coleman earlier this year at the opening of Harold Hill fire station in Romford

Shifts dispute 'looks inevitable'

LONDON

FBU members look likely to take industrial action in London this month in a long-running dispute over shifts after "relentless attacks" on members' conditions by brigade management.

London fire brigade has tabled proposals to alter the working patterns of firefighters. The controversial proposals – first announced in 2005 – have caused much anxiety among the workforce.

While the brigade says publicly that it wishes to reach a collective agreement with the FBU, union officials are sceptical, pointing out that the brigade's negotiators have not shifted their position in four years, despite their proposals being opposed by 98% of firefighters.

Ian Leahair, FBU executive council

member for London, said: "Our concerns have not been addressed. We await the next meeting of London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, but we anticipate that the dispute short of strike would commence

Brigade negotiators have not shifted their position in four years, despite their proposals being opposed by 98% of firefighters

with a ballot of the London membership in early to mid-June.

"Should the authority decide to impose change at its meeting in June, we would seek to ballot members for strike action against such imposition."

At present, membership consultation is

taking place through London FBU regional committee members.

Leahair said: "Given the brigade's relentless attacks on our members' conditions of service, it looks inevitable that industrial action will take place in London during the summer months.

"In our opinion the London mayor Boris Johnson could go some way to prevent such action by recognising a major stumbling block for good industrial relations in London is Brian Coleman, his appointed chair of the authority. Coleman's dictatorial and arrogant approach to trade unions and negotiations continues to cause unrest amongst firefighters."

He added: "We call on the mayor to remove Brian Coleman so that the London fire brigade can negotiate properly with the FBU."

FBU: Government has no mandate for cuts

GENERAL ELECTION

There is no mandate for cuts in public services, the FBU has warned. Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary warned the new Con-Dem government: "We do not believe that people voted to see their emergency and other essential public services cut, to pay for the banks' bail out."

"Cuts mean firefighters take longer to get to an emergency, perhaps because the nearest fire station has been closed, perhaps because there are not enough firefighters to crew a fire appliance, perhaps because there are not enough to deal with the number of incidents, perhaps because night cover has been cut."

"We have already seen firefighter jobs cut over the past five years. As a result, lives are being lost that could have been saved."



FBU members lobby MPs against cuts

The Fire Brigades Union will fight to stop our service from being cut to pieces. Local communities and workers in the public services will need to fight as never before to defend our vital public services."

'Now keep promises on controls'

REGIONAL CONTROL

The FBU has told the new government that it must keep its promises to scrap the failed regional control project.

During the election, FBU member Graham Donaldson questioned David Cameron about the project on the BBC *Look North* programme. Cameron told him: "One

thing we would do to try and stop waste is the regionalisation of the fire service, the so-called 'FiReControl scheme'; it was going to cost £100 million, it's now costing £420 million. We will want to stop that in its tracks."

The Conservative policy green paper, *Control shift: Returning power to local communities*, promised to "abandon plans to region-

alise fire control (while providing new measures to enhance resilience in the case of a national emergency)."

Similar comments were made by Liberal Democrats to *Firefighter* magazine in March. The FBU wants an undertaking that the FiReControl project will be scrapped, with a timetable for the upgrading of existing control rooms.

New national officer

DAVE GREEN

Dave Green has been elected as national officer, taking up his post at the start of annual conference. Green defeated Phil Jordan, winning 58% of the vote. He was previously the executive council (EC) member for region 6.

Dave Green said: "There is no doubt that we face challenging times ahead as the extent of the proposed cuts across the public sector become known. FBU head office will play a key role in coordinating our response and organising campaigns against any detrimental proposals: from whatever source they come from. The union must be united in defending our members and the service from attacks in such areas as fire cover, pay, pensions and terms and conditions."

Action is suspended

ESSEX

Essex fire crews have agreed a temporary suspension of industrial action to help reach a negotiated agreement in the long-running dispute.

Essex fire station reps agreed to recommend the suspension on 29 April. It was extended on 13 May. Essex firefighters have been taking action short of strike for nine months over cuts and other issues.

Essex FBU secretary Keith Flynn said: "It's now in the hands of both sides' negotiators to seize this window of opportunity to iron out the final details for a potential settlement. However, if we are unable to deliver acceptable terms – in sufficient detail – then the window may close and industrial action may resume."

Sounding off!

KERRY BAIGENT

FBU national women's committee secretary

The truth about the Kate Ellis discrimination case

What really happened to firefighter Kate Ellis in Hampshire fire and rescue service is not at all what the papers would have us believe.

Kate's case was widely reported by the tabloid press, but typically the reporting leant on one small aspect of her evidence and not on the main facts of her case.

The actual story is that Hampshire fire and rescue service conceded that Kate had suffered:

- ◆ sex discrimination
- ◆ sexual harassment
- ◆ victimisation
- ◆ a detriment (in the form of a dismissal), and
- ◆ had been unfairly constructively dismissed.

John Warren, the employment tribunal chair, said of the brigade's first witness: "This is becoming embarrassing. As long as I have been a chairman, I have never seen a witness so comprehensively have their evidence demolished."

Kate Ellis contacted me a few years ago to talk to "another woman" about the treatment



Kerry Baigent: Kate Ellis received wonderful support from FBU

that she was receiving from some of her non-FBU colleagues at Kingsclere fire station. She recounted the horrific experiences to me and said: "I just want it to stop."

Kate talked about the wonderful support that she was receiving from her FBU brigade officials – both of whom are male and have continued to give her unswerving support – and other firefighters in Hampshire.

Kate's brave decision to take a grievance out in a bid to "just make the treatment stop" was incredibly not upheld by Hampshire fire and rescue service. Even worse, she was subjected to disciplinary action, while the male colleagues who had treated her so badly carried on with their daily lives.

Kate was left with no choice other than to resign from the job she loved and to take her case further to an employment tribunal. Kate had the full support of the Fire Brigades Union in doing so, and her win is also a victory for the FBU.

Conference 2010

Mick Shaw: Union needs maximum unity for the challenges ahead

President warns of tough times ahead

MICK SHAW

FBU president Mick Shaw warned conference of coming attacks on pay, pensions and conditions of service from the new Con-Dem government.

He argued that with retail price index inflation standing at 5.3%, any government-imposed pay freeze would represent a real cut in living standards for firefighters. He said: "I wouldn't mind austerity if I felt those who could most afford to pay were paying their fair share."

Shaw pointed to the supposed need for the new government to listen to the markets. He said: "We hear it every day. The markets are worried. The markets say we must do this."

"Who are these markets? These markets are in fact the same bankers who created the crisis in the first place."

And Shaw said the bankers' bonus culture had

spread to fire chiefs. "Chief fire officers are being awarded six-figure pay-outs plus huge bonuses. They have fallen into that culture. We say this is not acceptable."

Speaking about the general election, Shaw said the result could have been a lot worse. He said he had feared the FBU's parliamentary group would be wiped out. As it was, two key members, Labour MPs Andrew Dismore and David Drew, narrowly lost their seats. Shaw praised their "excellent work" representing the union's interests in the last parliament. The BNP had been well beaten, he added.

Shaw urged delegates to have comradely discussions about strategy and tactics in the new political situation, to achieve "maximum unity" in the struggles ahead.

Speaking at his last conference as president, Shaw said he hoped the union would be "united, strong and determined" in the period ahead.

Campaign for repeal of anti-union laws

TRADE UNION RIGHTS

Conference pledged to lobby the TUC for a campaign to repeal anti-trade union laws, after court judgements that challenged the right to take effective strike action.

Mark Rowe (*right*), Merseyside FBU membership secretary and the mover of the motion, said that recent court

judgments encouraged employers to seek "legal redress" rather than negotiate with unions.

He said: "There is no obligation on the employer to cooperate with the union. It would make a huge difference if this employer bias was removed."

Delegates pointed to rulings in the BA cabin crew dispute that made it almost impossible to comply with the law, particularly if the workforce operated worldwide.

Rowe added: "Using the courts is a clear and coordinated action by employers to stop union members exercising their human rights."



Delegates pay their respects to brothers who died on duty

Don't attack our pay

PAY

FBU conference sent a clear message to the Con-Dem government that there will be a fight over pay in the next year or so.

Paul Wilson from Strathclyde FBU moved a resolution calling on the executive council to agree an annual pay formula in the face of the coming onslaught against public sector workers. He said: "The coalition is hell-bent on slashing funds for the public sector. We want our pay formula aligned to other professionals of appropriate comparison."

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack warned of a pay dispute in the coming years. He added: "I am putting the employers on notice. Engage with us properly or you will have one hell of a fight on your hands."

Wrack argued that the union had appointed a subcommittee to look into the issue of pay formulas. He said: "The union has been committed to having a multi-year pay formula. It is nonsense to go through the negotiation year in, year out."

He said: "We need to be clear – the employers have said they are not convinced by a long-term pay formula and we will not trade off our hard-won terms and conditions for minute increases in pay."

Wrack warned that the union would not



Matt Wrack: employers trying to use economic situation to bully members into accepting pay freezes

allow middle managers to be sacrificed by the employers to deliver small increases in pay for firefighters. He said: "The issue of pay is becoming increasingly difficult. Our employers are using the economic situation to bully our members into accepting pay freezes."

♦ The FBU has submitted a pay claim for 2010 in line with inflation, after discussions

with officials from around the country. The FBU executive council, in consultation with brigade, regional and sectional committees, submitted the claim last month. The union wants an increase in all NJC rates of pay equal to the percentage increase in inflation as identified by the retail price index (RPI) for June 2010.

Response times campaign will defend wider standards

IT'S ABOUT TIME

Conference agreed an executive council proposal for a campaign around response times as part of the union's wider defence of standards in the service.

The campaign follows an initiative by the FBU in Scotland, also called *It's About Time*, aimed at achieving a Scottish response standard. The executive council agreed to make the need for rapid and adequate emergency intervention a central theme of campaigning across the UK.

General secretary Matt Wrack argued that response times matter because it makes a difference when people are rescued. He said: "There are people who might be dead today, but are alive because of the intervention of firefighters. There are people who might have far more serious injuries, but for the rapid response of firefighters. We do the job because

we want to help people – and that's why we're right to be angry that response times have increased in recent years."

The campaign will include building the case for sufficient investment to allow local fire and rescue services to plan properly for emergency intervention. This must include ensuring adequate resources (firefighters, appliances and equipment) to enable fires and other emergency incidents to be tackled safely and professionally.

The campaign will build on work already undertaken by the union around the central importance of emergency intervention.

The resolution committed the executive council to develop a campaign for the introduction of national standards of emergency response. The union will support such an approach in all parts of the UK and will pursue this aim through all the appropriate government bodies.

Scottish government backs FBU drive

FERGUS EWING

Scottish fire minister Fergus Ewing (*below*) announced the formation of a working group to investigate response times, with the FBU represented on the advisory body. He told delegates: "I am today announcing that I will be asking the advisory unit, services and union to look at the formation of a working group to review response times in Scotland."

He added: "Given the increasing pressure on funding, I stress that this review and recommendations must be delivered against future budget constraints."

Ewing, the first Scottish minister to address FBU conference, promised to continue to work closely with the union. Senior Scottish government officials regularly meet with the FBU. He said he had "personally met union colleagues on over 20 occasions in the last year alone".



TUC calls for fair way out of economic crisis

FRANCES O'GRADY

The new parliament is not new politics, but old politics, TUC deputy general secretary Frances O'Grady told the conference. "It's got more Oxbridge graduates than women, twice as many old Etonians as ethnic minorities," she said. "Around a quarter come from just one occupational group: bankers. Although lots of them had second jobs too – as consultants to hedge funds."

Who will pay for the economic crisis "is likely to become the defining issue of the next parliament," O'Grady said. "We must not allow the jobs, pensions and public services of ordinary working people to become the line of least resistance."

"Our public sector deficit wasn't caused by having too many firefighters, nurses or teachers. It wasn't caused by providing public sector workers with a modest pension in their old age. It was caused by a handful of greedy bankers and speculators."

"We will protect the jobs, pay and pensions of public servants who did nothing to cause this mess."

She outlined a three-point plan to escape



O'Grady: clamp down on tax avoidance

from economic crisis: "First, fair taxation, including a clampdown on the £25 billion tax avoidance industry and a supertax on the super rich."

"Second, priorities. We don't need to waste billions on expensive consultants, failed IT projects, arbitrary reforms, pointless market testing exercises and needless privatisations. Nor should we squander billions on the renewal of Trident."

"Third, investment for growth."

She said this meant investment in public services, education and a faster and greener transport system.

Solidarity with workers of Colombia

INTERNATIONAL

Conference gave a very warm welcome to a Colombian trade union leader, who explained how in his country being a trade unionist is a matter of life or death.

Jorge Gamboa, an executive member of CUT, the largest union federation in Colombia, led oil workers in a campaign against privatisation in 2007-08. He was the subject of an assassination attempt by police and now has to travel with bodyguards.

Since CUT was founded in 1986, some 2,700 trade unionists have been murdered.

Gamboa urged the FBU to join the campaign to free trade unionists and political prisoners from Colombian jails.

He said the neo-liberal model was the



Matt Wrack with Jorge Gamboa

enemy of every worker in the world and was the cause of hunger and poverty.

He urged delegates to press the UK government on human rights abuses by the Colombian army and to lobby against the proposed free trade agreement between Colombia and the European Union.

→ Justice for Colombia: www.justiceforcolombia.org

'More should be done for Haiti'

Conference recognised the tremendous work done by firefighters in Haiti and pledged to continue campaigning to assist the country through the TUC.

An emergency resolution from the FBU black and ethnic minority members (B&EMM) committee paid tribute to the union's "humanitarian, political and financial responses" to the earthquake in January. FBU members were involved in carrying out life-saving rescues.

Speaking for the resolution, Andre Fernandes, B&EMM rep for region 12, said that "much more needs to be done in order to reconstruct and develop Haitian society, infrastructure and economy".



Alan Miles with a Breaking Rocks graduate

Guitar heroes

ON THE FRINGE

Conference fringe hosted *Breaking Rocks*, an inspiring documentary telling the story of Jail Guitar Doors, a charity which provides musical instruments to prisoners to help facilitate rehabilitation and prevent re-offending.

The film is directed by FBU member Alan Miles and features performances by graduates of Jail Guitar Doors as well as from artists who have supported the programme, including Mick Jones (the Clash), Chris Shiflett (Foo Fighters), Sam Duckworth (Get Cape. Wear Cape. Fly) and Billy Bragg.

The fringe meeting included music from Jonny Neesom and Leon Walker from Jail Guitar Doors.

Domestic violence

EQUALITY

The trade union movement must take up the issue of domestic violence if it is serious about equality, national women's committee member Jo Byrne (*below*) told delegates.

Conference unanimously backed a resolution to tackle domestic violence, which

accounts for one-fifth of all UK violent incidents.

"Domestic violence is a blight on society and can only be fought by challenging sexist attitudes in society," said Byrne. Firefighters saw the results of domestic violence in their work. Arson was increasingly used as an act of revenge against women and children.



Help for reps to meet new challenges

EDUCATION

A robust education process is enabling union officials and union reps to meet the challenges thrown at the FBU by employers and the government, conference agreed as part of the education review.

Conference agreed the executive council policy statement "Education Review 2009", which reported on progress made by the union in improving its educational programmes.

This included a training needs analysis to determine the types of courses officials believe they need to carry out their functions.

Appointing a regional education and learning organiser and developing regional education plans are key to providing ongoing training for officials.

Conference also called on officials to use the TUC education programme "wherever and whenever this is feasible", as it is difficult, if not impossible, for the union to replicate either the longer or the advanced courses. The FBU has a remarkable record of sending officials on courses, which needs to continue.

General secretary Matt Wrack said: "FBU education is very healthy and something we should all be proud of. We punch well above our weight in taking up TUC courses – especially short courses." The union took up almost four times as many courses as would be expected by its size.

Defending community safety, public services and jobs

THE NEW GOVERNMENT

Conference unanimously backed an executive council resolution calling for coordinated action against the onslaught facing the public sector. General secretary Matt Wrack said members could not shy away from the truth about a coming "age of austerity". "We must face squarely the truth no matter how bitter that truth," he said.

"This cuts coalition wants to take a chainsaw to our pay, our conditions, and our pensions. The Con-Dems will attack working-class living standards in ways we've not seen since the early days of Thatcher."

He said workers had to be clear that the government had no mandate for cuts. "The Tories got barely a third of the vote. Many people voted Lib-Dem to keep out the Tories. Millions voted Labour as the lesser evil. Voters didn't vote for cuts. They didn't vote for austerity," he said.

"We must have optimism and a strategy to stop the cuts agenda," said Wrack. "The FBU should be proud of its record protecting the fire and rescue service. We've defended our jobs, we've resisted cuts and we've protected the public. We've been the only force that has stood up for the fire and rescue service in this country."

"Look at the lobbies of parliament we've organised. Thousands of firefighters have rallied to demand MPs listen to us. And they had to listen to us. Look at our disputes. Look at the magnificent support we gave to our brothers and sisters in South Yorkshire last year."

Wrack pointed to the examples of union action in Greece and Spain and called for unions to work together. He said: "There is a real desire for united action and there is a growing recognition in the various public sector unions that we need to act together to win."

Unions and MPs prepare for fight

JOHN MCDONNELL

Labour MP John McDonnell (right) received a warm welcome from FBU delegates after a rousing speech calling for the mobilisation of the trade union movement against cuts.

"I warn you they will come for us. They will come for your pensions and your jobs," he said. "The one service where they won't attack the pension scheme is the police. They will need them to bring us into line when we resist."

McDonnell called for coordinated action from the whole of the trade union movement, through the TUC. He said: "We need every ally we can get."

McDonnell is the secretary of the FBU's parliamentary group. He praised the union's role in creating the Trade Union Coordinating Group of MPs and unions to

bring together industrial and political work. "It is made up of eight unions and will be an important body in the coming battles," he said, "and we rely on your strength and solidarity in lobbying government on the key issues."

McDonnell thanked firefighters for their support in securing him an increased majority in Hayes and Harlington. While at the conference, the FBU executive council agreed to support McDonnell in his campaign for the Labour leadership.

McDonnell said he understood why working-class people felt abandoned by new Labour.



"We lost the election because we betrayed the trust of working class people. The coalition that supported Labour was virtually destroyed in 13 years of new Labour government. I can't support anyone for leader who voted for the war in Iraq, or for privatisation of public services."

"We deserted our core support. We lost the trust of working-class people who founded our party. We systematically alienated these people."

"Trades unions mobilise for the party and then they don't go and repeal the anti-trade union laws. This is what lost us the election," he said.

He outlined the central planks of his programme: to stop privatisation, to abolish tuition fees, to build council houses again and to increase pensions and restore the link with earnings.



PICTURES:
Stefano Cagnoni



Greece: the eye of the storm

THE ECONOMIC CRISIS AND GOVERNMENT AUSTERITY IN GREECE HAVE MET WITH GROWING WORKERS' RESISTANCE

Hundreds of thousands of workers – including firefighters – have taken part in recent protests against cuts in Greece. On 5 May, 300,000 people flooded into Athens, the largest workers' demonstration since the 1970s. It was the fourth general strike against cuts this year.

Greece is the eye of the economic storm. Its economy shrank by 4% last year and the government has a large deficit. It may default on its debts.

In order to please the bankers and their financial markets, the Greek government agreed a plan with the European Union and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which includes a public sector pay freeze until 2014 and the capping or scrapping of bonuses (which amount to two months' wages). The

The state pension would be cut and two extra years added to the average retirement age

state pension would be cut and two extra years added to the average retirement age. VAT would go up from 19% to 23%. Other indirect taxes, including those on fuel, are planned to rise.

During the protests on 5 May, three bank workers were killed when their workplace was firebombed. Greek unions condemned the violence but refused to stop protesting.

They blamed the government for the deaths and pointed to bank bosses' failure to protect workers. Bank management had threatened any workers with the sack if they joined the strike and locked doors throughout the day. Bank workers reported that the building was not licensed and did not contain sprinklers. Staff had not received fire safety training or carried out fire drills.

Firefighters have been involved in the protest wave this year. In March, 5,000 Greek firefighters demonstrated for full-time contracts. At present, Greek firefighters are employed part time. The police attacked firefighters with tear gas and stun grenades when they tried to reach the economics ministry.





Members of the Greek disaster special forces unit, including firefighters, march through the Greek capital Athens during a general strike against cuts

YIORGOS KARAHALIS/REUTERS



It's about TIME



Andy Dark, FBU assistant general secretary with responsibility for IRMP, explains why the union has launched a major campaign for national standards of response times

East Sussex fire and rescue service currently has a standard of one fire engine with a minimum crew of four to arrive at a house fire within 13 minutes on 90% of occasions.

For the city of Brighton this is a major reduction in standards. Before national standards of fire cover were abolished, much of the city centre would have received one fire engine with five firefighters within five minutes and the second appliance with four firefighters within eight minutes.

Just across the border in Surrey, the current attendance standard is that 85% of the population will receive an appliance within eight

minutes of a call. There is no mention of risk or local circumstances. Apparently Surrey is considering worsening its standard to an appliance within 10 minutes.

If this is the case then, quite obviously, the attendance standard is based on the resources that the brigade has, not the risk faced by the community.

Devon and Somerset fire and rescue service has a single response time, regardless of location, of the first appliance within 10 minutes. Meanwhile Grampian has set no target attendance times for any incidents unless they involve a threat to life.

These cases sum up the problems with

emergency response at this moment. The result is a postcode lottery, where people in some parts of the country have to wait for over an hour before anyone arrives to put a fire out. This is not acceptable to firefighters – the public deserve a better service than this. The FBU is determined to defend our service and the central role of emergency response within it.

Response times go up

Attendance times have worsened significantly over the last decade. The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) *Review of Fire and Rescue Service response times: Fire Research Series 1/2009* shows how



average response times in England increased between 1996 and 2006 (see Table 1).

Figures released in the UK parliament on 22 March 2010 show that response times to dwelling fires in many parts of the country continued to worsen in 2007 and 2008.

Deaths 'offset'

The authors of the CLG report predicted the effect of increased response times:

- 13 additional fatalities in dwelling and other building fires each year;
- possibly 65 additional deaths in road traffic collisions (RTCs); and
- an £85m increase in other buildings fire damage.

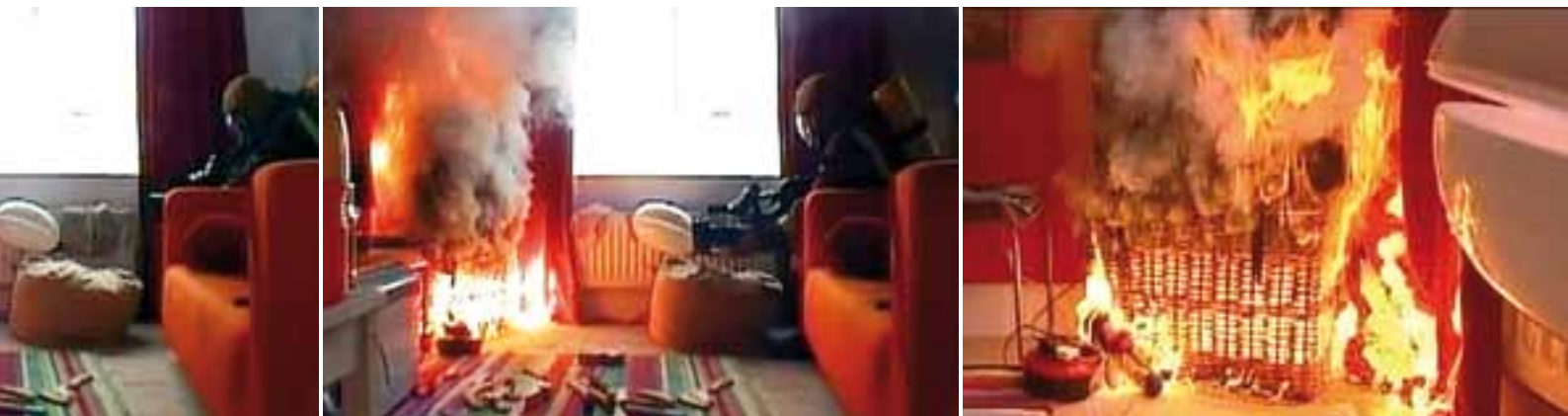
The CLG report expressed no remorse or alarm at the 13 fire deaths caused by increased attendance times. Instead, the report concluded that: "Annual dwelling fire fatalities fell by 142 between 1996 and 2006. This suggests that the impact of increased response times on dwelling fire deaths has been more than offset by other factors, such as community fire safety, between 1996 and 2006."

To the consternation of the FBU, the message sent out by this report is that there is no urgency attached to attending fires, even those where people need rescuing. As long as community fire safety is preventing fires from starting in 11 houses, so the "theory" goes, it does not matter if someone dies when a fire starts in a twelfth house. Their death has been "offset".

It's about lives saved

Attendance times matter first and foremost because a rapid response will save lives

DANNY LAWSON/PA PHOTOS



RESPONSE

Table 1 Average response times for primary fires in England
Source: CLG Review of Fire and Rescue Service response times: Fire Research Series 1/2009, Table 3, page 17

Primary fire category	Average response time (minutes)		Increase in response time
	1996	2006	
Dwelling fires	5.5	6.5	18%
Other buildings fires	5.7	6.8	19%
Vehicle fires	6.7	7.9	18%
Outdoor fires	9.7	11.1	14%

and reduce injuries, both to the public and to firefighters.

The Entec consultancy reports *National Risk Assessment of Dwellings* (1996) and *Response Time Fatality Relationships for Dwelling Fires* (1998) indicated that the probability of fire death was linked to the attendance time of fire appliances.

If appliances could attend in less than five minutes, the probability of death was 3.8 per hundred fires. If appliances took six to 10 minutes to attend a fire, the probability of death was 4.2 per hundred fires (see Figure 1).

The implication is clear: beyond five minutes, any increase in attendance time means an increase in the probability of fire death.

Entec estimated that there would be a 20% increase in the number of fire-related deaths per year – 115 additional deaths – with a five-minute increase (slower) in attendance times nationwide. It also concluded that there would be a 7% decrease in the number of fire-related deaths nationwide per annum – 39 lives saved – with a five-minute reduction (faster) in attendance times.

It's about homes

The CLG report found a “strong correlation” between average loss per fire and response times and calculated that increases had already caused £307m of additional losses.

The insurance industry has also seen larger real-terms rises in insured losses. The

Association of British Insurers (ABI) report *Tackling Fire: A Call for Action* (December 2009) said: “The number of fires has been falling, but the cost of these has been increasing.” Fire damage claims in the first half of 2009 cost £639m. Between 2002 and 2008 the cost of the average fire claim for both commercial and domestic fires doubled to £21,000 and £8,000 respectively.

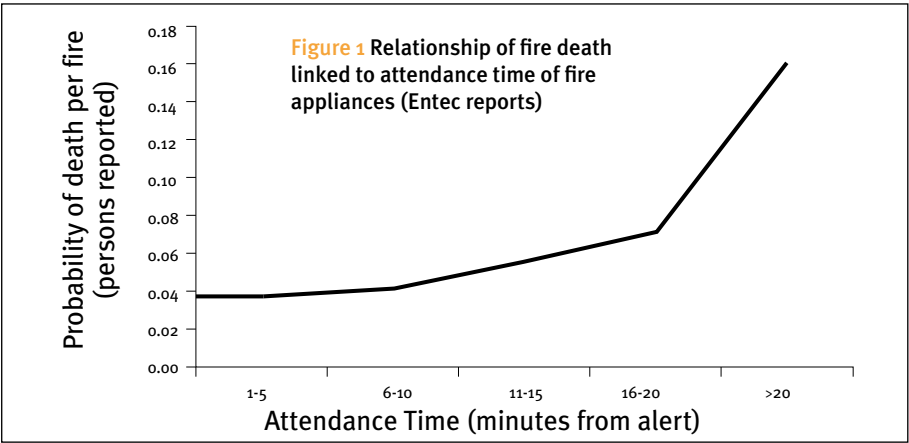
The impact of fire on the environment has long been recognised. Fires in the UK release around 2m tonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere every year. Urban fires can blight the built environment for a long time. And longer response times mean grassland fires in rural areas will burn areas of natural beauty, scarring the landscape and engulfing property and crops. It is the business of the fire and



rescue service to protect the environment. Our own and future generations depend on it.

For national standards

Before 2004 there were national guidelines on standards of fire cover. These guidelines were universally treated as minimum standards. Firefighters and fire and rescue services prided themselves on saving seconds





wherever possible and arriving at fires well inside the minimum standard time.

Under the old national standards of fire cover, the level of service the public received from its fire brigade depended on where you lived.

While there was different service provision between town and country, there was also a levelling effect. Cities and villages had different standards of fire cover, but broadly every city had the same standard of service as the others and broadly every village had the same standard of service as other villages.

The FBU believes that each country within the UK should adopt a national standard. In setting standards, governments should start from the principle of providing genuine and progressive improvement in the service provided to the public. That is why the union has published its report, *It's about time*.

The emergency planning process within the fire and rescue service must also include ensuring there are adequate resources (firefighters, control staff, appliances and equipment) to enable fires and other emergency incidents to be tackled safely and professionally.

The first intervention in any emergency incident will be the receipt of a call for assistance by fire control. National standards must ensure adequate firefighters and control staff on duty to answer such emergency calls. There should also be continued assessment against rigorous performance standards for receipt and mobilisation of calls by emergency fire controls.

To this end, fire and rescue services must ensure that they are genuinely improving on the standards that existed before the changes in the legislation, the abolition of national standards and the introduction of IRMP. Any such process must obviously include the full involvement of professional firefighters and their representatives – the Fire Brigades Union.

These principles must underpin national standards. In the absence of such standards in all governments across the UK, these principles should be incorporated into the IRMPs of the individual fire and rescue services.

Firefighters will not accept the argument that response times are irrelevant. Built into

National standards in Wales

On 21 March 2006, the Welsh Assembly government informed the three Welsh fire and rescue services of the adoption of a new attendance time standard, entitled "Service delivery standard to fires in the home". The circular stated:

"The Service Standard for attendance to fires in the home has been developed based upon a comprehensive model which considers population (numbers of people), population density (dealing with remoteness) and population type (risk of fire).

"This Service Standard aims to provide 80% of Welsh homes with an attendance to a fire in the home within 10 minutes. The Service Standard also recognises that as a result of local population numbers, population density and population types some areas will attract a 5-minute attendance to a fire in the home ..."

While the FBU might seek to improve on the service standard in Wales, it is significant that the Welsh Assembly government agreed in principle with a national standard covering all three services in Wales. If such an approach is possible in Wales, it must be possible across the whole of the UK.

a firefighter's DNA is the desire to intervene swiftly – to make that difference as to whether someone lives or dies, whether they are temporarily overcome with smoke or maimed for life, or whether someone loses their home and their prized possessions.

To be told that rapid response to fires and other emergencies somehow doesn't matter, or is "offset" by other fire prevention measures, simply won't wash with firefighters. Response times matter because people and their lives matter. That's our creed.

→ The report is on the FBU website www.fbu.org.uk



Who is going to defend fire service pensions?



**Sean Starbuck,
FBU national
officer, explains
the latest
proposals on
pensions**

The Fire Brigades Union has a proven history of defending the pension rights of its members. It has achieved some notable successes in recent years including defending ill-health provision for members, campaigning successfully for a fairer commutation factor implementation date and gaining access to a pension scheme for firefighters working the retained duty system (RDS).

Common to each of these successes is that other organisations have “talked the talk” but that the FBU has “walked the walk” – alone. Recent rumblings around public sector pensions mean that we may be tested again.

At the Firefighters Pension Committee (FPC) on 15 March this year, the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) presented three papers which spelt out the changes it wanted to make to the 1992 Firefighters Pension Scheme (FPS) and, to a smaller extent, to the 2006 New Firefighters Pension Scheme (NFPS). These papers – pensionable pay, options for the future, cap and share – were introduced as possibilities for committee members to discuss and give views on.

Pensionable pay

The FBU had been raising for a considerable time issues around the inconsistent way that fire and rescue authorities

decide what element of pay is pensionable. We welcomed a previous consultative paper (FSPC 11/2009) designed to establish how any anomalies could be dealt with in the future. However, the pensionable pay paper proposed changes that raised huge concerns and were both unnecessary and inappropriate at this forum. They are issues contained in the Grey Book and should be dealt with at the National Joint Council. After a strong representation from the FBU this paper was withdrawn and CLG indicated that further work would be carried out before it was represented in the future.

Options for the future

The options for the future paper can only be described as a kite-flying exercise by CLG. The FBU recognised this tactic and immediately challenged CLG to provide more details on the options before any real discussion could take place. CLG resisted this challenge initially but eventually agreed that they would provide more information to the next FPC.

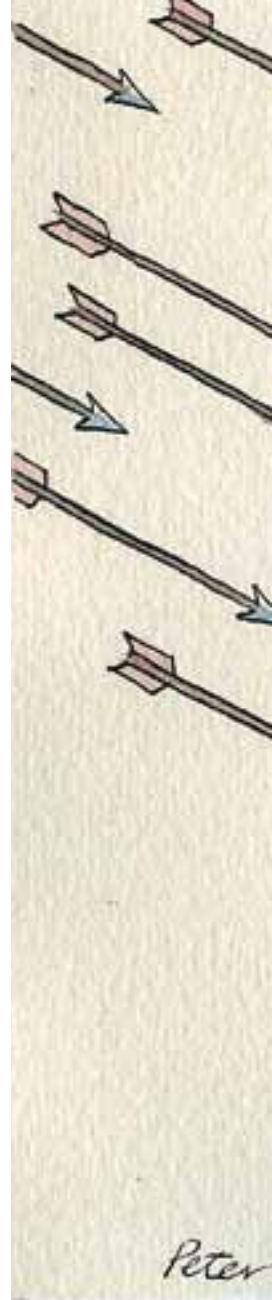
The FBU has subsequently written to CLG to emphasise the requirement for information and informed CLG that the union intends, if necessary, to use an actuary to challenge its assumptions.

Unfortunately one organisation which claims to represent managers in the fire service did not recognise the game that CLG was playing and has responded by indicating what changes may be acceptable, therefore prematurely setting its bottom line expectations. The FBU has made it clear to CLG that we will only consider options when it has all the relevant information and it will not be pressured into a knee jerk reaction on an issue of this importance to members.

Cap and share

The final paper – cap and share – outlined CLG’s intention to introduce a cap and share system to the FPS and the NFPS.

Cap and share is a method that is being adopted in a number of public sector schemes to reduce the risk of pension





cost increases to the employers. In brief, if actuarial factors show that the cost of the scheme has increased, then members have to share the cost of the increase.

Once the employers' share reaches a cap determined by the Treasury then members have to meet the entire increased cost. Members share the cost or bear the cost by increasing contributions or taking a cut in their benefits.

CLG explained that cap and share would be imposed on the firefighters' pension schemes following their next valuation in 2011 and will come into effect around 2016. The 2011 valuation would be used to examine how the schemes have fared since 2007. Changes to assumed rates of inflation, pay increases and life expectancy will be costed and subjected to the cap and share arrangement.

The FBU outlined that there was much more detail required on this issue before any decisions could be made and highlighted that the risk-sharing element of the decision would have to be considered in great detail, especially in the 1992 FPS, given that it is a closed scheme.

What next?

All three of these proposals are clearly linked and the FBU executive council has decided to request more detailed information before any decision is taken. It is very important to remind CLG that the whole point of

introducing the NFPS in 2006 was based upon it being more cost effective and necessary to ensure the viability of the schemes. It is clear that the projected costs of introducing this scheme have not been measured, and for CLG to suggest that firefighters' pension schemes have not been reviewed is totally inaccurate.

The executive council and all officials and members of the union will receive updates as this situation develops and as more details emerge.

The FBU will continue to defend firefighters' pension schemes with the same determination and commitment that it always has. It would be nice, however, if we did not have to do it alone and other organisations did something other than talk about it.

The FBU has made it clear that it will only consider options when it has all the relevant information and it will not be pressured into a knee jerk reaction on an issue of this importance to members

Firefighter safety acknowledged

Fire employers must protect firefighters

SAFETY

All firefighters know they are putting their lives on the line when they do their job. And after so many tragic deaths in recent years, firefighters want to know that everything is being done to reduce the risks of serious injury and death.

One way that this can be done is by reinforcing the health and safety duties fire authorities and fire boards have towards the firefighters they employ. That is why the Fire Brigades Union has negotiated a statement with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the national safety body, the Chief Fire Officers Association and the chief fire and rescue adviser. Further guidance is expected to be published this month.

Health and safety law

Health and safety law gets a bad press. But it is one of the main reasons why work deaths have fallen in the UK. The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 applies to all activities of fire and rescue authorities as the employers of fire and rescue service staff¹.

Health and safety law requires employers to ensure the health, safety and welfare at work of their employees. But the duty is not absolute and is qualified by the test of what is "reasonably practicable".

The new HSE statement recognises that firefighters are sent into dangerous situations in order to save lives when anyone else would be seeking to get away from the danger.

It also recognises that "there is often an unrealistic public expectation that firefighters will put themselves at risk even when

such risks outweigh any potential benefits to be gained".

It states that: "Many incidents firefighters face can develop at speed, some can develop in unexpected ways – and firefighters may, from time to time, be confronted with situations outside their experience."

Good safety management

The statement sets out what fire service employees should expect of their fire and rescue authorities as employers:

for their own, their colleagues' and the public's health and safety;

◆ are based on robust, proportionate, carefully considered and non-bureaucratic risk assessments which:

- ◆ identify significant hazards;
- ◆ set out safe systems of work, including appropriate control measures, equipment, competencies and training; and
- ◆ are effectively implemented;

◆ include arrangements for monitoring health and safety performance, including learning from incidents and using this information to improve performance; and

◆ include arrangements for consultation with employees and their representatives.

The primary duties under health and safety law are on employers. HSE inspectors, when inspecting or investigating an individual fire and rescue authority, will look at risk assessments, command and control, training, equipment and other systems.

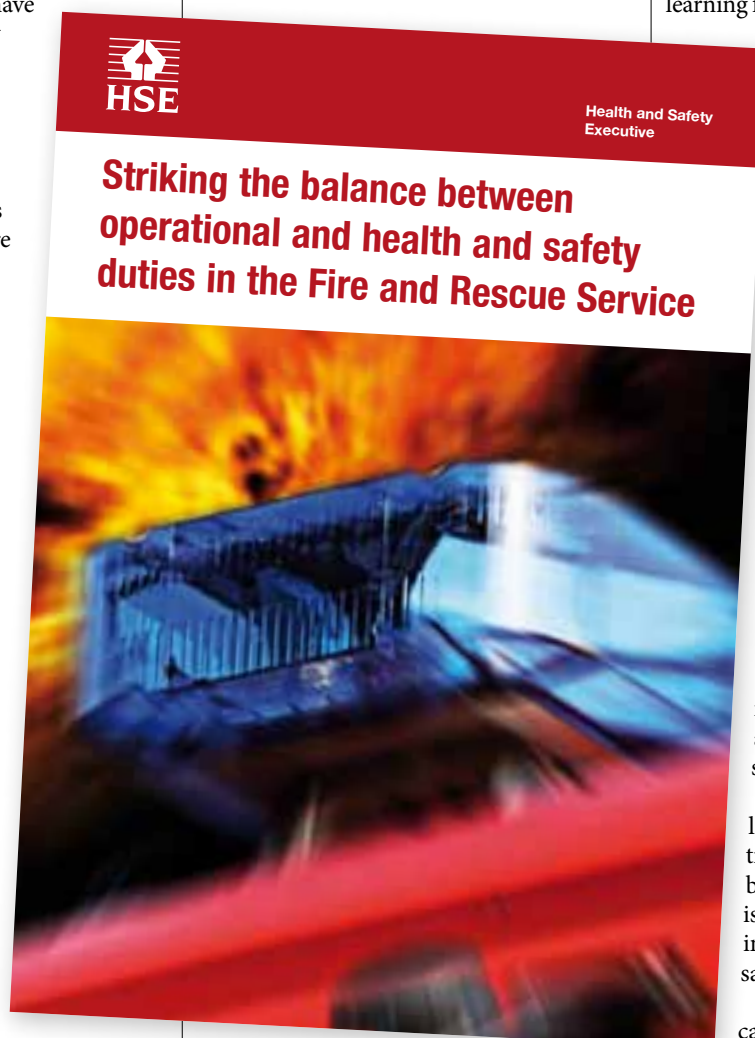
Duties on firefighters

The law also places duties on employees to take reasonable care of themselves and others and to cooperate with their employer. The HSE statement sums it up like this: "In essence, this means that employees should act sensibly and responsibly within the command and control of their employer; they should not act recklessly."

The statement reinforces the legal right of FBU safety representatives to represent our members, to be consulted on health and safety issues and to have a key role in improving standards of health and safety management.

FBU representatives and officials can use the statement and the forthcoming guidance to ensure systems are in place to prevent firefighter deaths and injuries.

➔ The statement is on the HSE's website *Striking the balance between operational and health and safety duties in the Fire and Rescue Service*
www.hse.gov.uk/services/fire/duties.pdf



Good health and safety management systems should:

- ◆ take account of the wider context in which they operate, so that the fire and rescue authorities can:
- ◆ deliver an effective and realistic service; and
- ◆ enable staff to take appropriate care

¹ The statement does not currently apply in Northern Ireland. The Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland told *Firefighter* that it will be considering this in due course, in consultation with the FBU.

I was stranded by the volcano

Q Can my employer make me pay back wages because I was stranded and unable to report for duty due to the Icelandic volcano?

A There is no simple “Yes” or “No” to this question. It depends on your employer’s policy on dealing with circumstances that make it difficult for employees to get to work.

The Employment Rights Act 1996 makes it unlawful for an employer to make a deduction from the wages of a worker unless the worker has agreed in writing to the deduction being made or the deductions are required by law (for instance, deductions for PAYE and national insurance).

So if an employer reduces or fails to pay wages without the employee’s consent it may amount to an unlawful deduction from wages, even if the employee owes money to the employer. In other words, employers are not entitled to take the law into their own hands.

But this does not prevent an employer from recovering money that has been overpaid – nor from not paying wages that have not been earned because an employee has failed to turn up for work – if the employer’s policy on this is part of the employment contract.

Employees have a duty to report for work (other than for reasons that their contract specifies they will get paid time off for, such as sickness or maternity leave). Employers should have a policy that sets out how they will deal with circumstances that prevent or make it difficult for employees to get to work. It should cover contractual and statutory rights and the obligations of employees.

Such a policy might advise that failure to report for work will be classed as unpaid leave if

holiday cannot be taken.

Whether employees can be granted additional time off depends on their employment contracts and the approach that their employer chooses to take as there is no entitlement in statute.

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber called on employers to be sympathetic to the plight of their employees and be flexible in their approach – allowing them to extend their leave, or use leave days from the following year, for instance.



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

Legal Beagle

Answers to some frequently asked legal questions that members put to the FBU

Constructive dismissal

Q What is the difference between constructive and unfair dismissal?

A When a worker resigns in response to a significant and fundamental breach of their contract of employment by their employer – such as a demotion or pay cut without consultation – it is called constructive dismissal. Constructive dismissal

is therefore distinct from unfair dismissal, which is when an employer dismisses an employee for reasons that cannot be justified. Constructive dismissal is, nevertheless, a form of dismissal.

Proving constructive dismissal is one of the most difficult areas of employment law. Cases are hard to win because employees have a great deal to prove to an employment tribunal. They cannot simply resign and claim constructive dismissal because they disagree with something their employer has done, or they are unhappy with the work they are being asked to do.

They must show that:

- the employer committed a fundamental breach of contract – a breach of the implied term of mutual trust and confidence;
- they felt they had no option but to leave;
- they did not do anything that would suggest they accepted the breach.

If an employee does not resign fairly soon after the breach of contract happens, this can be interpreted as their having accepted the breach.

They must also be able to show that they followed the ACAS code of practice on disciplinary and grievance procedures. If they cannot, then an employment tribunal may reduce any compensation it awards for constructive dismissal. The code is available at www.acas.org.uk

A claim for constructive unfair dismissal must be lodged in the employment tribunal within three months less one day of the last day of employment. It is not possible to have an extension to this timescale.

→ The advice published here is not intended as legal advice on individual cases. Write in with your legal problem to legalbeagle@fbu.org.uk and those of widest relevance to FBU members in the workplace will be selected and answered in future editions. With thanks to Thompsons solicitors.

‘The idea is to have as big a group as possible going’

Tony Smith, Hertfordshire FBU brigade secretary, joins a motorbike ride to honour US firefighters killed in the 9/11 attacks on New York

September 11 next year will mark the tenth anniversary of terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York. More than 1,360 people from over 90 countries died after two planes were flown into the twin towers. The toll included 343 firefighters.

Next year UK firefighters can join a motorcycle ride from Chicago to New York to commemorate those who lost their lives in the line of duty on 9/11.

The invitation comes from the American firefighters’ motorcycle club via Tony Smith, FBU Hertfordshire brigade secretary, blue watch commander at Garston station in Watford and keen biker. Tony discovered the commemorative ride, held every year, when surfing the net. He got in touch with the organisers and was told he would be

welcome to join in. So in 2007 he flew out to Chicago with a couple of colleagues. They all rented motorbikes and got on the road.

“It was an amazing experience,” said Tony, who rode the route again last year, staying with Chicago firefighters before setting off for the 1,000-mile ride to New York. “The sense of camaraderie is fantastic. There were firefighters, retired firefighters and also quite a few policemen on the run. The atmosphere is incredible”.

Solidarity

Tony was motivated to join the ride by his admiration for the firefighters who took part in the twin towers rescue, a desire to pay his respects to those who died and to show solidarity with survivors. “It was a terrible loss. So many firefighters lost colleagues,” said Tony.



Firefighters on the 1,000-mile ride from Chicago to New York





“Such an attack could have happened in London as it did in New York. I didn’t just want to go to ground zero as a tourist, but to meet up with firefighters who lived through the event, hear their stories and offer support by listening to what they went through. For me, it’s all about being there.”

There are also quite a few union activists from the firefighters’ union IAFF on the ride – so it provides a chance to network and swap experiences. “As soon as I found the website, I knew I wanted to go on the memorial ride. It seemed a good way of paying my respects and meeting up with firefighters. The response we got was very welcoming.”

The experience certainly didn’t disappoint. “It’s a trip of a lifetime,” said Tony, who plans to make it for the third time next year. “It’s about a thousand miles from Chicago to New York and we pick up people from Michigan and Wisconsin along the way. As it is early fall (autumn), and the weather is usually good, it’s a spectacular ride and a good chance to network and swap experiences as well as honouring those who died.”

On the way to New York, the biking firefighters stop off at Shanksville, Pennsylvania to pay respects to the crew and passengers from United Airlines Flight 93. All 40 died. But their bravery and quick thinking saved many others. As hijackers took control of the plane, passengers learned of the attack on the twin towers – mobiles work in mid-air. The hijackers’ plan to crash the plane into another iconic building was thwarted.

Block parties

On the memorial ride, the bikers enter New York with a full police escort through Brooklyn, followed by food and drink at a block party. Then it’s on to the big parade facing ground zero, where firefighters and police, citizens and tourists pay their respects to those who died while trying to save others. Afterwards, there are sights to see, block parties to go to, motorcycle dealers to visit – and, of course, firefighters’ memories of 9/11 to hear.

But there is more commemoration to come in the ride’s packed schedule. The next day the riders traditionally take part in the “Elvis” run with more than 1,400 other firefighting bikers. A police-escorted ride is held annually to honour the memory of firefighter and biking legend Mike “Elvis” Delane of the Newark fire department, who died in the line of duty in 1994.

Tony’s trips normally last 10 days, Chicago firefighters have offered free accommodation – but the costs of flights, food, petrol and sustenance and beer money can add up to around £2,000. If you’re a firefighter who loves motorbikes and wants to pay respects to fallen US colleagues, it could



Memorial at the Fire Department of New York’s “Ten House” which lost six firefighters and was seriously damaged on September 11, 2001



Taking part in the annual “Elvis” parade in Newark, New Jersey, to honour the memory of firefighter and biker Mike “Elvis” Delane who died in the line of duty in 1994



With US firefighters at a block party after last year’s run

just be the trip of a lifetime. And if Tony’s experience is anything to go by, you could want to make it more than once.

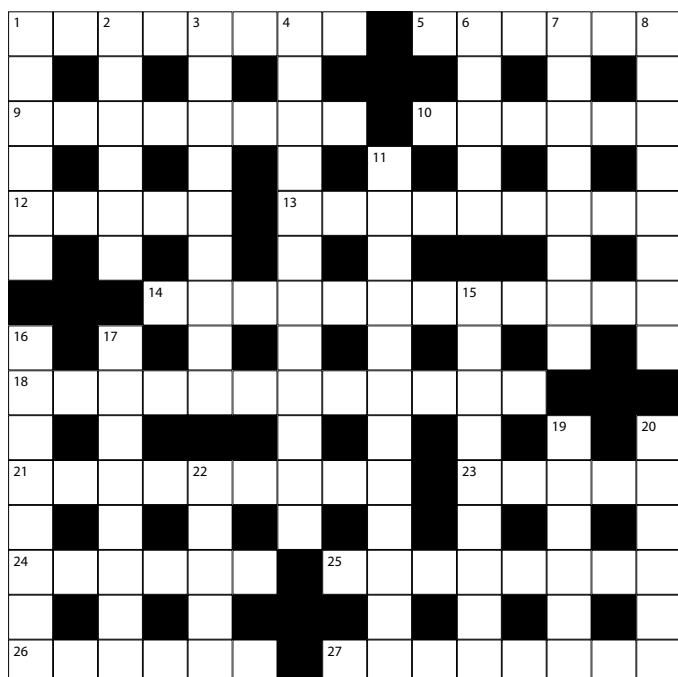
Tony is also exploring the possibility of getting a motorcycle club for UK firefighters off the ground, if there is enough interest. It could, he said, even take the form of a UK chapter of the AFF-MC, though it’s very early days.

Anyone interested in joining the ride next year should contact Tony through the website below. If you really want to go but don’t have a motorcycle licence, you could always hire a support vehicle to ride the route. Or do the trip by sports bike.

“The idea is to have as big a group as possible going,” said Tony, who has already got a firm “Yes” from six colleagues. So if you’re interested, get saving – and get in touch as soon as possible.

➔ More information:
fbu.herts@ntlworld.com
www.aff-mc.com
www.iafflocal2.org

Quick Crossword

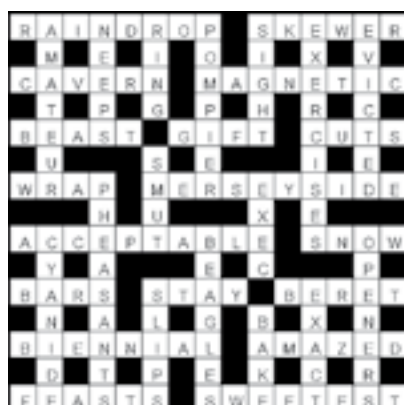


ACROSS

- 1 Fellow sailor (8)
- 5 Size up; take stock (6)
- 9 The in-crowd (8)
- 10 Italian wine produced in Piedmont (6)
- 12 Facial expression betraying displeasure (5)
- 13 Take from one place to another (9)
- 14 Inferring a rule from specific cases (12)
- 18 The only sort of drink to imbibe when on duty (3-9)
- 21 Uncovered – not a good idea to run a car thus (9)
- 23 Without company (5)
- 24 Essential bit of canteen kit (6)
- 25 Without being asked (8)
- 26 Nappy, across the pond (6)
- 27 Pseudonyms (3-5)

DOWN

- 1 Start out (3,3)
- 2 The freezy part of the fridge (3-3)
- 3 John, secretary of FBU parliamentary group (9)
- 4 People who attend plays etc (7-5)
- 6 Strike-breakers, commonly (5)
- 7 To be so with the truth is to tell lies (9)
- 8 Lack (8)
- 11 Act of not paying the Inland Revenue what you ought (3,9)
- 15 Not the real thing (9)
- 16 Made offensive or disparaging remark (8)
- 17 Arabic word for (Palestinian) uprising (8)
- 19 One registered abroad for the sake of 11 (3-3)
- 20 Anyone for this? (6)
- 22 Took without permission; scarf-like garment (5)



Solution to May 2010 crossword

Winner of the April 2010 quiz

Hannah Poole of Kent

Answers to

May 2010 quiz

1. A – Iceland
2. C – East
3. B – Indonesia
4. C – Vesuvius
5. A – sulphur dioxide



Prize quiz

Win a Flymo Glide Master 380

1. What nickname was given to the 1900 UK election on account of the Boer War?

- a. the khaki election
- b. the jubilee election
- c. the Madagascar election
- d. the inebriated election



2. In what election did Britain last experience a hung parliament?

- a. 1929
- b. 1964
- c. 1974
- d. 1940

3. Universal male suffrage was introduced prior to which election?

- a. 1832
- b. 1868
- c. 1918
- d. 1914

4. In 2005, Tony Blair was the only Labour leader to have done what?

- a. win three elections
- b. win three consecutive elections



- c. become a father for the fourth time
- d. be removed from government

5. In the 2010 election voters were angered by which of the following?

- a. being locked into polling stations
- b. being locked out of polling stations
- c. not being given the correct ballot papers
- d. being made to wait too long for the election result



HOW TO ENTER

To win a Flymo Glide Master 380 lawnmower please send your answers to the Prize Quiz by 30 June 2010 on a postcard to: Prize Competition (June 2010), FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE. Include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.

StationCat

... brings you the news they don't want you to hear

He didn't like their tone ...



"I object to being bullied on my own quarterdeck by a woman," wrote London's chief fire officer. "Admittedly the women's branch is behind that of the men's – the men's is more important, and we know better how to deal with our own sex." All right, I'll level with you – that's not the present chief fire officer of London. **It's Sir Aylmer Firebrace (honestly, that was his name) writing in 1938 to the Home Office after what seems to have been a difficult meeting with the Women's Voluntary Service.**

Sir Aylmer, like many fire chiefs of the time, came into the fire service from the navy, and still sounded remarkably like an upper class naval officer. "The tone of the criticism I have so far received from them has left much to be desired," he wrote grumpily.

His letter has lain in a file in the London fire brigade museum in Southwark for 70 years and came to light in the course of the research for a book commissioned by the FBU called *Firefighters and the Blitz*. The book will be out on 7 September, the seventieth anniversary of the start of the Blitz in 1940.

Time to act on equality



Not every politician will welcome the new Con-Dem partnership in government. Lib-Dem Lynn Featherstone MP is now responsible for equality at the Home Office. Back in 2008, Featherstone thanked London firefighters for turning out when her boiler looked like it might explode. Quite right to call, said the FBU at the time.

Not so Tory Brian Coleman. He attacked Featherstone, describing her as "dizzy" and an "airhead" and saying she should have called a plumber. Mindful of the public purse, he demanded she pay for the call out.

Featherstone promised to complain to the London fire commissioner: "Firstly, on the issue of how he will deal with a chair of the authority who is happy to send out a message which is completely contradictory to the ethic and central message of the fire service. Secondly, in a service in which there is a strong shift to move away from any discrimination or sexism – to ask what action he will take over having a chair who

thinks it is OK to denigrate women in the way Brian Coleman did. Those who know Mr Coleman say this is typical."

The Cat reminds Featherstone – now is the time for action on equality.



Now for some cuts: David Cameron tries the equipment in Carlisle

Joined up thinking



David Cameron spent some of the night before the general election visiting Carlisle fire station, which helped the Conservatives to a narrow 853-vote victory in the city, the first Tory win there since 1964. Naturally, he claimed he would try to protect fire services from the cuts. That's what you do when you visit fire stations. But the fire service and Carlisle's fire station do not merit a single mention on the website of the new Conservative Carlisle MP John Stevenson, which does talk about several policy areas – police, education and all the other things you would expect. **Station Cat is tempted to the uncharitable thought that the only reason the fire station was chosen for a visit was that that was where Mr Cameron would find people still awake in the small hours.**

World class



Politicians of all persuasions love to jump on the fire service bandwagon – when it suits them – or when an election is looming. Gordon Brown said: "It gives me enormous pride that Britain has the best fire service in

the world, putting their lives on the line for others every day," he said two years ago at the Fire Service Charity's 2008 Spirit of Fire awards. **The best fire service in the world it may be; but not much longer, if it keeps getting cut.**

So it's goodbye from him



The Cat bids farewell to former fire minister Shahid Malik, who lost his seat at the election.

Malik said at the election count: "Yes I lost but I certainly don't feel like a loser. I feel like a winner. It's been a privilege to serve for the last five years and although it's been the hardest thing I've done I wouldn't change a thing – well maybe one or two." **Does he mean FiReControl? Too late now for regrets.**

Pay cut cabinet?



Spare a thought for the new cabinet, whose ministers voted themselves a 5% pay cut. Still, even junior ministers get £89,000, on top of nearly £65,000 for being an MP. No doubt the pain is softened by news that **four-fifths of the cabinet (18 out of 23) are millionaires anyway.** Together they are "worth" about £50m, when property values, business interests and shareholdings are taken into account.

When is a single not a single?



Being a cheapskate when he's paying his own fare, Station Cat asked for a second class sleeper to Glasgow. He was told there weren't any. He had to pay extra for a cabin to himself.

But at the station, the attendant showed him into a sharing cabin, and said he'd have it to himself. **The problem, apparently, is that ScotRail's computer thinks there are more single cabins than there are, and fewer double ones.**

And we're supposed to believe privatisation makes things more efficient! If only the railways were still publicly owned, the *Daily Mail* would have exposed this absurdity ages ago.

✂ if you have any snippets you think Station Cat should get his sharp claws into email: stationcat@fbu.org.uk

25-year badges



Nicky Evans (r), Northants headquarters, Moulton, receives her 25-year badge from national officer David Green



Adrian Crook (r) receives his 25-year badge from region 13 executive council member Tam McFarlane



Mick Hawes (r), Northants headquarters, Moulton, receives his 25-year badge from national officer David Green



Peter Curtis (l), Millwall, London, receives his 25-year badge from WAC secretary Sally Harper



George McDonnell (r), Northants headquarters, Moulton, receives his 25-year badge from national officer David Green



Robert McLeganhan (l) Cowcaddens, Glasgow, receives his 25-year badge from health and safety rep Stewart Kinnon



David Evans (r), Brackley, Northants, receives his 25-year badge from national officer David Green



Steve Isaacs (l), Springbourne, Dorset, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Karen Adams



Terry Blisset (r), Northants Ops Support, receives his 25-year badge from national officer David Green



(l to r) Andy Davis, Chris Stockley and Pat Wynn, green watch Springbourne, Dorset, receive their 25-year badges from brigade secretary Karen Adams and watch manager Terry Brokenshire



Sian Griffiths (l), Millwall, London, receives her 25-year badge from WAC secretary Sally Harper as white watch Millwall look on

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Change of address or next of kin

Advise your Brigade Membership Secretary of any change of address and Head Office of changes to next of kin or nominations for benefits.

FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE

0808 100 6061

The line provides advice for **personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues.**

For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.

T THOMPSONS SOLICITORS